



# Health & Consumer Voice

September 2008

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## EU gets tough on ring-tone scams

EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva announced the results of a recent "sweep" on mobile phone services, focusing on websites offering services such as ring-tones and wallpapers. The enquiry, which was carried out between 2-6 June on more than 500 websites across the 27 Member States plus Norway and Iceland found that 80% of the sites checked need further investigation for suspected breaches of EU consumer rules.



The sweep is a new kind of EU investigation and enforcement action. Member States carry out simultaneous, coordinated checks of web pages for breaches in consumer law in a particular sector. They then contact operators with apparent irregularities and ask them to clarify their position and/or take corrective action to bring them into line with EU rules.

The mobile phone enquiry focused on 3 types of practices in the sector which compromise consumer rights: unclear information about the offer price, trader information and misleading advertising.

80% of websites checked are now subject to further investigation. The total number of websites checked was 558; the total number of websites showing potential irregularities is 466. The number of cases possibly requiring cross border co-operation between different national authorities or CPC cases (Consumer Protection Co-operation Network) is 76.

50% of websites checked targeted children (279 websites out of 558). These websites used children's cartoon characters, well known TV characters or required parental consent. The same high level of irregularities (80%) was also found on these sites.

Many websites indicated multiple irregularities:

- Almost 50% of all the sites checked showed some irregularity related to the information about the offer price (268 websites out of 558). On many websites prices and related charges and fees were not clearly indicated or not referred to at all – until the consumer was invoiced via their phone bill. Prices did not include all taxes, and in the case of a subscription, the word subscription was not clearly mentioned or the period of subscription was not clear.

*(continued page 2)*



## In brief



### Launch of the Europa School Diary

On 15 September, Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva launched the 2008/09 Europa School Diary, the fifth edition of this highly popular educational tool for young EU consumers. The Diary offers students information on a wide range of topics of specific concern to them, such as travel, nutrition, drugs, money matters, environment and sustainable consumption. It also seeks to address the identified gap in young peoples' knowledge when it comes to consumer rights and information. The Diary is accompanied by a teachers' guide containing background information on different consumer topics, exercises to test students' understanding, questions for discussion and suggestions for research projects. Both the Diary and the teacher's guide are available in all EU languages. Almost 3 million orders have already been submitted for this year's edition of the Diary, by over 17 600 schools across the EU, highlighting the success of this educational tool. The Europa Diary and teaching kit can be ordered by schools for free online, and will be distributed on a first come, first served basis, while stocks last.

For further information, please visit:

[http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/empowerment/cons\\_education\\_en.htm#diary](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/empowerment/cons_education_en.htm#diary)

- Over 70% of all the websites checked lacked some of the information required to contact the trader – the trader name, geographic address or the contact details were incomplete (399 websites out of 558). This is against EU law: the eCommerce Directive 2000/31/EC requires details of the service provider, including an email address, to be displayed.
- Over 60% of websites checked presented information in a misleading way (344 out of 558). Information on the contract was available on the site, but hidden in small print or hard to find. Goods

and services are advertised as "free", but the customer is misled and later finds that there are charges or that they are tied into a contract.

### So what happens next?

Companies will be contacted by the national authorities and asked to clarify or correct problems identified. Failure to do so can result in legal action leading to fines or even closure of their websites. For cross border cases, national authorities will work with authorities from other Member States. National authorities are asked to report back on their progress in the first half of 2009.

For further details and to view a breakdown of the results by country please see:  
<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/08/516&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN>

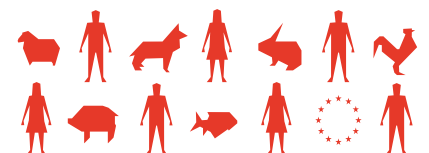
## First European Veterinary Week

**The European Commission will organise the first European Veterinary week from 10-16 November, in partnership with the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) and the French Presidency.**

The week will open with a high level conference in Brussels on 10 November, entitled "One Health: Healthy Animals = Healthy People". This event aims to stimulate dialogue on successful information diffusion and cooperation between the different players in the animal health field for the implementation of effective bio-security measures at borders and on-farm. It will examine the positive impacts of high animal health standards on human health and consumer wellbeing. Panel discussions will look at issues such as on-farm bio-security, import controls and the "One Health" concept. Participants will include Member State veterinary experts, animal health stakeholders, customs officials, airport and travel organisations, representatives from

Parliament and Council, and all relevant Commission services.

Later in the week, the FVE General Assembly in Hanover will gather 800 veterinarians from across Europe. Part of its programme will be devoted to speeches presenting Veterinary Week and its main messages: "One Health" and "Prevention is better than cure." Specific topics to be raised are the new animal health strategy and what it means to the veterinary practitioner, the importance of a strong veterinary network and how to translate policy into action.



**EU Veterinary Week 2008**  
**Animals + Humans = One health**

For further information, please see:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/strategy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/strategy/index_en.htm)

# New rules on pesticide residues in food

EU Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou warmly welcomed a new regulation on pesticide residues which came into force on 1 September. This marks an important step forward in the ongoing EU effort to ensure the safety of food in Europe.

The new Regulation (EC No 396/2005) revises and simplifies the former regime based on the principle that food produced or imported in one Member State must be safe for consumers right across the European Union. The new rules will ensure that pesticide residues in food are as low as possible and take into consideration the safety of all consumers, including vulnerable groups such as babies, children and those with unusual diets.

Consumers are exposed to pesticides because small quantities remain in harvested crops as residues. The amounts of residues found in food must correspond to the lowest amount of pesticide used on the crop to achieve the desired effect of pest control.

A maximum residue level (MRL) is the highest level of a pesticide residue that is legally tolerated in food and feed. The new rules, which set harmonised Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs), in addition to promoting food safety, will benefit traders and importers through the elimination of difficulties provoked by the former system of 27 lists of national MRLs

## Why the need for change?

The previous MRL-regime was overly complex as it combined harmonised EU and divergent national rules. Different MRLs could apply to the same pesticide for the same crop in different Member States.

This situation led to confusion about which MRL was applicable. It made life difficult for traders and importers and gave rise to numerous questions from consumers, farmers and traders, particularly in cases where food exceeding the defined MRL in one Member State was acceptable in other Member States.

## What's new?

The new Regulation covers approximately 1100 pesticides currently or formerly used in agriculture in or outside the EU. It lists MRLs for 315 agricultural products. These MRLs also apply to processed products, adjusted to take account of dilution or concentration during processing. Where a pesticide is not specifically mentioned, a general default MRL of 0.01 mg/kg applies.

As from 1 September, a database on the European Commission's website can be used to search for the MRL applicable to each crop and pesticide. This newly developed database is freely and easily accessible to each and every citizen, with a view to guaranteeing transparency and providing up-to-date information on EU pesticide residues legislation.

The new regime is the result of a considerable joint effort by the European Commission, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the Member States.

Member State authorities are responsible for control and enforcement of the MRLs. The Commission carries out inspections in the Member States to assess and audit their control activities. EFSA is responsible for safety assessments, which are based on the properties of the pesticide, on the maximum levels expected on food and on the different diets of European consumers.

For further information, please view:

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/protection/pesticides/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/protection/pesticides/index_en.htm)



The new database on pesticide MRLs can be found at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/sanco\\_pesticides/public/index.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/sanco_pesticides/public/index.cfm)

## In brief



### Commission consultation on a common methodology for classifying consumer complaints

On 8 July, EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva launched a public consultation on developing a common methodology for classifying consumer complaints. Consumer complaints give a clear indication of consumers' dissatisfaction and data on complaints can be used to help identify which markets are not functioning as they should. As part of the Consumer Markets Scoreboard, the European Commission is developing indicators to provide evidence on how markets in various sectors of the economy perform from a consumer perspective. While the crucial importance of monitoring complaints is recognised by most Member States, the existing data on consumer complaints do not allow cross-country comparisons or benchmarking of markets. The European Commission is therefore keen to develop a common methodology for classifying such complaints. To this end, Commissioner Kuneva would like to receive the views of all interested stakeholders on this issue. Interested stakeholders are strongly encouraged to find out more about this project through the public consultation paper and to send their views to the European Commission.

To complete the consultation online, please visit:

[http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index_en.htm)



# Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed: a European success story

Welcoming the publication of the 2007 Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) annual report, Commissioner for Health Androulla Vassiliou underlined the important role that RASFF plays in our joint efforts to ensure a high level of food safety for EU citizens. RASFF serves to prevent food safety crises by identifying problems at an early stage, thereby minimising and extinguishing potential health threats.



RASFF is a tool enabling the quick and effective exchange of information between Member States and the Commission when risks to human health are detected in the food and feed chain. All Members of the RASFF (the 27 Member States, the European Commission, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as well as Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland) have a round-the-clock service to ensure that urgent notifications are sent, received and responded to in the shortest time possible.

2007 saw a record number of RASFF notifications – 7,354 in total. 961 alerts and 2015 information notifications were received, giving rise to 4339 additional information notifications. Some might be tempted to suggest that this could indicate that European food safety standards were falling. Not so. The high number is mainly attributed to the increase of the additional information notifications – up by 13.5% compared to 2006. This shows that Member States are communicating

more intensively following notifications, which can only be good news for food safety.

Most notifications in 2007 concerned official controls within the internal market (43%), while 42% concerned products from non-EU countries which were blocked at the EU border by control authorities when risks were identified. The category for which the most alerts were raised was fish products (21%), like last year.

## Promoting food safety worldwide

The RASFF report also outlines forthcoming activities. One important initiative is a project to promote the concept of a worldwide Rapid Alert System for food safety. The Commission has already helped interested countries outside the EU to develop national systems to improve consumer protection and organised training seminars in 2007 under the "Better Training for Safer Food" initiative. The Commission has also given financial support to a regional pilot Rapid Alert System for Food set up between Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, Philippines and Myanmar. The ultimate goal of the Commission's overall efforts in this field will be to join all of these national and regional systems in a global network of food safety alert systems.

Awareness of the RASFF continues to rise; it is becoming stronger and more effective as time goes by; and it serves as a successful working model for other countries seeking to improve their levels of consumer protection.

For more information, please see:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/rapidalert/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/rapidalert/index_en.htm)

## In brief



### New website for health promotion videos launched

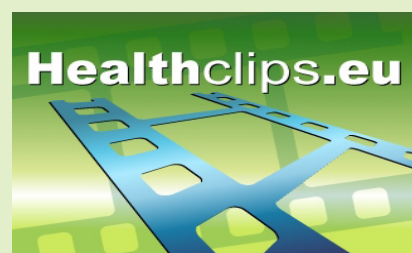
At the European Conference for Health Promotion and Education in Turin on 10 September, the Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumers launched a website for health promotion videos and advertisements produced across Europe. The site aims to encourage best practice for health promotion by showcasing and sharing the excellent material produced by different Member States. The videos come from a wide range of countries, from Sweden to Portugal, Ireland to Poland, and they address issues such as addiction prevention, HIV/AIDS, cancer, nutrition and physical activity and safety in the workplace. As well as viewing the videos, site users can request to use the material for information purposes, for example in schools. The site is also open to further development – new clips and feedback on the site are welcome.

For further information, please visit:

<http://www.healthclips.eu/>

To comment on the site, please go to:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/videos/feedback/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/videos/feedback/index_en.htm)



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Layout: Rosita Scanferla.

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health\\_consumer/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm)

Email: [sanco-newsletter](mailto:sanco-newsletter)

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